

# **Metal-solid electrolyte catalysts.**

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WO8302605 (A1)  
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## **Abstract of EP 0480116 (A1)**

The invention refers to the use of porous conductive (metallic or oxidic) films in contact with a solid electrolyte (e.g. stabilized zirconia or beta "-Al2O3) for the catalytic conversion of chemical compounds to other chemical compounds via external or internal application of an electrical potential or current between the conductive catalyst film and a second counter electrode film also in contact with the solid electrolyte. This set-up permits easy application of the recently discovered phenomenon of Non-Faradaic Electrochemical Modification of Catalytic Activity (NEMCA) for the improvement of catalytic properties (activity, selectivity) of metals and conductive metal oxides.

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(54) **Metal-solid electrolyte catalysts.**

(57) The invention refers to the use of porous conductive (metallic or oxidic) films in contact with a solid electrolyte (e.g. stabilized zirconia or  $\beta$ "-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) for the catalytic conversion of chemical compounds to other chemical compounds via external or internal application of an electrical potential or current between the conductive catalyst film and a second counter electrode film also in contact with the solid electrolyte. This set-up permits easy application of the recently discovered phenomenon of Non-Faradaic Electrochemical Modification of Catalytic

Activity (NEMCA) for the improvement of catalytic properties (activity, selectivity) of metals and conductive metal oxides.

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The present invention refers to metal-solid electrolyte catalysts and especially to the use of porous conductive (metallic or oxidic) films in contact with a solid electrolyte (e.g. stabilized zirconia or  $\beta$ "-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) for the catalytic conversion of chemical compounds to other chemical compounds via external or internal (as discussed below) application of an electrical potential or current between the conductive catalyst film and a second counter electrode film also in contact with the solid electrolyte. This set-up permits easy application of the recently discovered phenomenon of Non-Faradaic Electrochemical Modification of Catalytic Activity (NEMCA) for the improvement of catalytic properties (activity, selectivity) of metals and conductive metal oxides.

Chemical reactors in the Chemical Industry are, in their great majority, catalytic, i.e., they include a metal or a metal oxide catalyst (active phase) usually dispersed in the form of small particles on a usually inert porous carrier (e.g. SiO<sub>2</sub>,  $\gamma$ -Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>). The catalytic action, i.e., the conversion of reactants to desired products takes place on the surface of the metal or metal oxide active phase. Promoters are commonly used on the active phase or on the carrier surface in order to improve the effectiveness (reaction rate or product selectivity) of the active phase.

In this invention a solid electrolyte is used as the carrier in order to support the active phase (figure 1).

An electrical potential is applied between the porous catalyst film (catalyst) and a second porous metal or metal oxide film (counter electrode) which is placed either on the side of the solid electrolyte film which is opposite to the one where the catalyst is deposited (fig. 1) or on the same side with the catalyst (fig. 2). The applied electrical potential, which is usually on the order of  $\pm 0.5V$  up to  $\pm 1.5V$  causes electrochemical pumping of ions from (or to) the solid electrolyte to (or from) the metal surface, and leads to a dramatic enhancement of the catalytic rate and/or to a change of the catalyst product selectivity.

The potential can be applied to the catalyst either externally (e.g. by means of a potentiostat, galvanostat or battery) as shown in Figures 1 and 2 or internally, i.e. by means of the potential difference developed between two metals of different electronegativity supported on the solid electrolyte (marked by 1 and 2 in Figure 3) and forming a galvanic cell, the two metals being in electrical contact with the catalyst and the counter electrode, respectively (Figure 3). The necessary potential difference can also be developed directly between the catalyst and the solid electrolyte, since, such a potential difference always exists (Figure 4). In this case no counter electrode is required and the cata-

lyst can either form a continuous film (Figure 4a) or small particles supported both on the external and the internal surface of the porous solid electrolyte (Figure 4b).

The solid electrolyte together with the supported catalyst and auxiliary electrode films is placed in a metal tube where reactants are continuously introduced and products removed, thus forming a continuous flow chemical reactor (Fig. 5). In all the above cases (Figures 1,2,3,4 and 5) the catalyst can be porous, i.e., permeable to gases. This makes the present invention different from all previous applications of solid electrolytes (fuel cells, electrolyzers etc.). The applied potential of current by means of a potentiostat or galvanostat can be either continuous or can be varied periodically in time.

The present invention, i.e. both the set-ups described in Figures 1,2,3,4 and 5 and their operation in enhancing catalyst performance are substantially different from the set-ups and operations described in the existing publications related to the effect of Non-Faradaic Electrochemical Modification of Catalytic Activity, i.e. the NEMCA effect (Vayenas, Bebelis, Neophytides, J. Phys. Chem. 92, 5983 (1988); Bebelis @ Vayenas, J. Catal. 118, 125 (1989); Neophytides @ Vayenas, J. Catal. 118, 147 (1989); Vayenas, Bebelis, Neophytides @ Yentekakis, Appl. Phys. A 49, 95 (1989); Lintz @ Vayenas, Angew. Chemie 101, 72, (1989); Intl. Engl. Ed. 28, 708 (1989); Vayenas, Bebelis @ Neophytides in "Studies in Surface Science and Catalysis". G. Centi and F. Trifiro eds., Elsevier Sci. Publ. 55, 643 (1990); Vayenas, Bebelis @ Ladas, Nature 343, 625 (1990); Vayenas, Bebelis, Yentekakis, Tsiakaras @ Karasali, Plat. Met. Rev. 34, 122 (1990)) because in all the above publications it is made clear and emphasized that the solid electrolyte in the experimental set-up is non-porous, i.e., impermeable to gases. Consequently in these previous set-ups there is complete separation of the reactant and product gas stream. Also in all the previously described set-ups the auxiliary as well as the reference electrode, which is not needed in the present invention, are always and necessarily on the opposite side of the gas-imperious solid electrolyte from the catalyst film, i.e. the described set-ups are always of the type shown in Figure 1, with the important as previously mentioned difference of the gas-imperiousness of the solid electrolyte.

The fact that in the present invention the solid electrolyte is not gas - impervious and thus no gas-stream separation is required make the present invention much easier to use in industrial applications than set-ups requiring gas stream separation. This important advancement in the state-of- the art has become possible due to our unpublished dis-

covery that the solid electrolyte ions can be continuously regenerated from reactant gases present in the reactant stream during catalyst operation so that no separate air stream is required as in previous descriptions of the NEMCA effect.

The use of solid electrolytes in fuel cells is well known for many years (e.g. L.L. Hegedus, C.G. Vayenas and J.N. Michaels U.S. Patent 4,463,065). In these configurations, which are used for the production of electrical power one of the reactants (fuel), e.g.  $H_2$ ,  $CO$ ,  $CH_4$  is fed to the one side of the solid electrolyte (which is non-porous) while the other reactant (usually  $O_2$ ) is fed to the other side of the solid electrolyte. Suitable porous electrocatalysts are deposited on both sides of the solid electrolyte in order for the electrochemical combustion to take place and for electrical power to be produced. An other capability of the solid electrolyte fuel cells is the use of fuels like  $NH_3$  - (C.G. Vayenas and R. D. Farr, Science 208, 593 (1980), U.S. Patent No. 4,272,336) or  $CH_3OH$  (S. Neophytides and C.G. Vayenas, J. Electrochem. Soc. 137, 839 (1990)) for Chemical Cogeneration, i.e., the simultaneous generation of electrical power and useful chemical products, in this case  $NO$  from  $NH_3$  and  $H_2CO$  from  $CH_3OH$ .

The main differences of this invention from all previous applications of solid electrolytes in Fuel Cells and in Chemical Cogeneration are the following:

1. All reactants and products are on the same side of the solid electrolyte, which in this case does not separate the fuel from the oxygen. The catalyst is also on the same side of the solid electrolyte together with products are reactants (figures 1 and 2).
2. The chemical reactions which take place are catalytic and the induced rate increases are not subject to the Law of Faraday (C.G. Vayenas, S. Bebelis and S. Ladas, Nature, 343, 625 (1990)), contrary to the reactions taking place in fuel cells which are electrochemical and obey the Law of Faraday.
3. The solid electrolyte can be porous in contrast to fuel cells where the solid electrolyte must be necessarily non-porous in order to avoid mixing of fuel and oxygen.
4. The counter electrode can be placed on the same side of the solid electrolyte with the catalyst in contrast to fuel cells where it is placed necessarily on the opposite side.
5. What is attained by the application of the present invention is the improvement of catalytic properties (activity or/and selectivity) of metal or metal oxide catalysts and not the production of electrical energy which is the goal of every fuel cell. Also the present invention differs from all electrolysis processes utilizing solid electrolytes

(e.g. E.J.L. Schouler, Solid State Ionics 9/10, 945 (1983)) because there is no separation of the gas streams and the Law of Faraday is not obeyed.

The above differences 1,3 and 4 make the present invention much easier to use and operate than solid electrolyte fuel cells because in the latter the prerequisite of non-mixing of the two streams of fuel and oxygen constitutes one of the most difficult problems in their design and operation.

As referred to above, the present invention relates to industrial applications for carrying out catalytic reactions in chemical reactors. Examples of application which may be included in accordance with the present invention include, but are not limited to, the following examples:

#### A. Catalytic oxidations such as

- Oxidation of light hydrocarbons to  $CO_2$
- Oxidation of  $CO$  to  $CO_2$
- Oxidation of paraffins to oxygenated products
- Oxidation of olefins to oxygenated products
- Oxidation of alkyl-aromatics to oxygenated products.
- Oxidation of naphthalene to phthalic anhydride
- Oxidation of benzene to maleic anhydride
- Oxidation of butane to maleic anhydride
- Oxidation of methane to ethane and ethylene
- Oxidation of methanol to formaldehyde
- Oxidation of  $H_2S$  to  $SO_2$
- Oxidation of  $SO_2$  to  $SO_3$

#### B. Addition reactions such as

- $CO + H_2$  to higher hydrocarbons
- $CO + H_2$  to partially oxidized hydrocarbons
- $CO + H_2 +$  olefins to higher hydrocarbons
- $N_2 + 3H_2$  to ammonia
- $CO + 2H_2$  to methanol

#### C. Decomposition reactions such as:

- $NO$  to  $N_2$  and  $O_2$
- Higher hydrocarbons to lower hydrocarbons

The following working Examples represent a more detailed description of the invention.

#### Example 1

A Pt porous catalytic film with a surface area of  $4.2 \cdot 10^{-3}$  g-atom Pt is supported on a  $ZrO_2 - (8mol\%Y_2O_3)$  solid surface and acts as catalyst for the oxidation of ethylene to  $CO_2$  and  $H_2O$  (Fig. 6a). The temperature is  $370^\circ C$  the oxygen partial pressure  $4.6 \cdot 10^{-2}$  bar and the ethylene partial pressure  $3.6 \cdot 10^{-3}$  bar. Upon application of a current equal to  $1 \mu A$  between the catalyst and the counter electrode the rate of the catalytic reaction of ethylene

oxidation increases by 2600% i.e. from the value of  $1.5 \times 10^{-8}$  g-atom O/s to the value of  $38.5 \times 10^{-8}$  g-atom O/s (Fig. 6b). The catalytic rate increase is 74000 times higher than the rate of electrochemical pumping of oxygen ions from the solid electrolyte to the catalyst, (i.e.  $I/2F$ , where  $I = 1 \mu A$  and  $F$  is the Faraday constant) which is computed by the Faraday Law. Upon current interruption the rate returns to its initial value ( $1.5 \times 10^{-8}$  g-atom O/s) before current application.

### Example 2

A mixture of  $CH_4$  and  $O_2$  with corresponding partial pressures equal to  $5 \cdot 10^{-2}$  bar and  $0.2 \cdot 10^{-2}$  bar is fed onto a porous silver film supported on the surface of a porous  $ZrO_2(8\text{mole}\%Y_2O_3)$  solid electrolyte film. The products are  $C_2H_4$  (ethylene),  $C_2H_6$  (ethane) and  $CO_2$  at a temperature of  $650^\circ C$ . The selectivity to  $C_2$ -hydrocarbons (i.e. ethane and ethylene) is 40% i.e. 40% of reacting  $CH_4$  is converted to ethane (20%), ethylene (20%) and the remaining 60% to  $CO_2$ . Upon application of an electric voltage of -0.5 V between the catalyst and the counter silver electrode, i.e. by imposing to the catalyst a 0.5 V more negative potential than the one of the counter electrode, the selectivity to  $C_2$ -hydrocarbons increases to 60%, i.e. 60% of the reacting methane is converted to ethane (30%), ethylene (30%) and the remaining 40% to  $CO_2$ .

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 C.G. Vayenas, S. Bebelis, S. Neophytides in "New Developments in Selective Oxidation" (G. Centi and P. Trifiro, Ed.) Studies in Surface Science and Catalysis 55, pp.643-652, Elsevier, Amsterdam 1990.

1. A method for carrying out catalytic reactions which is characterized by the use of a metal or metal oxide in contact with a solid electrolyte and the application of an electric voltage or electric current between the catalyst and a counter electrode (Figures 1 and 2).

The solid electrolyte can be a conductor of  $O^{2-}$  (e.g.  $ZrO_2(8\text{mole}\%Y_2O_3)$ ),  $Na^+$  (for instance  $\beta''\text{-Al}_2O_3$ ),  $H^+$ ,  $K^+$  (substituted  $\beta''\text{-Al}_2O_3$ ) and it may have the shape of a tube (Figures 1a, 2a), or of parallel tubes or of a planar sheet (Figures 1b, 2b, 3 and 4) or of planar ribbed parallel sheets so that channels between the sheets are formed. The solid electrolyte can be porous or non-porous.

The metal can be a transition element and the oxide can be a transition metal oxide or a conductive mixture of both.

The catalytic reactions can be:

#### A. Catalytic oxidations such as

- Oxidation of light hydrocarbons to  $CO_2$
- Oxidation of CO to  $CO_2$
- Oxidation of paraffins to oxygenated products
- Oxidation of olefins to oxygenated products
- Oxidation of alkyl-aromatics to oxygenated products
- Oxidation of naphthalene to phthalic anhydride
- Oxidation of benzene to maleic anhydride
- Oxidation of butane to maleic anhydride
- Oxidation of methane to ethane and ethylene
- Oxidation of methanol to formaldehyde
- Oxidation of  $H_2S$  to  $SO_2$
- Oxidation of  $SO_2$  to  $SO_3$

#### B. Addition reactions such as

- $CO + H_2$  to higher hydrocarbons
- $CO + H_2$  to partially oxidized hydrocarbons
- $CO + H_2 + \text{olefins}$  to higher hydrocarbons
- $N_2 + 3H_2$  to ammonia
- $CO + 2H_2$  to methanol

#### C. Decomposition reactions such as:

- NO to  $N_2$  and  $O_2$
- Higher hydrocarbons to lower hydrocarbons

### Claims

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the voltage is not applied externally but is spontaneously created due to the different electronegativities of the catalyst and of the counter electrode material or spontaneously created between two other electrodes with different electronegativities (Figure 3). 5
3. A method according to claim 1, wherein no counter electrode is used and the ion conduction from the electrolyte to the catalyst occurs spontaneously due to the consumption of ions by the reactants on the catalyst surface and due to the concomitant potential difference between the catalyst and the solid electrolyte (Figure 4). The catalyst can be either in the form of a continuous film (Figure 4a) or in the form of supported particles (Figure 4b). 10 15
4. The method according to claim 1 where the applied electrical potential or current is not constant in time but is varied periodically in time. 20
5. The use of catalysts supported on solid electrolytes as described in claims 1, 2 and 3 in continuous flow chemical reactors (Figure 5). 25
6. The apparatus or set-up (chemical reactor) wherein the catalyst is supported on a porous solid electrolyte surface and the electrolyte is of stabilized zirconia or  $\beta$ "- $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ . 30
7. The apparatus or set-up (chemical reactor) according to claim 6, where all reactants and products are on the same side of the solid electrolyte together with the catalyst. 35
8. The use of the apparatus or set-up (chemical reactor) according to claims 6 and 7, for the catalytic conversion of chemical compounds to other chemical compounds according to claim 1. 40

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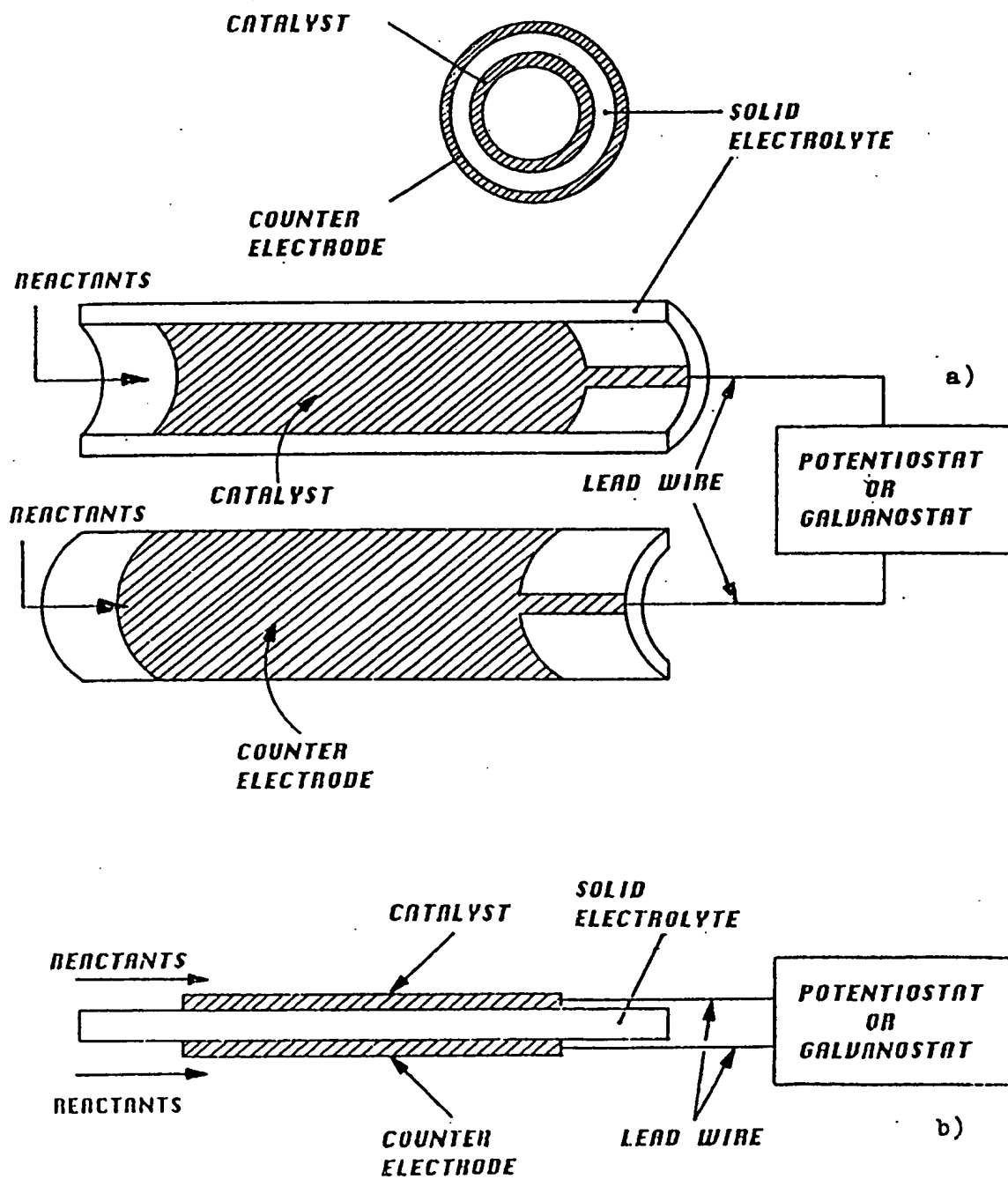
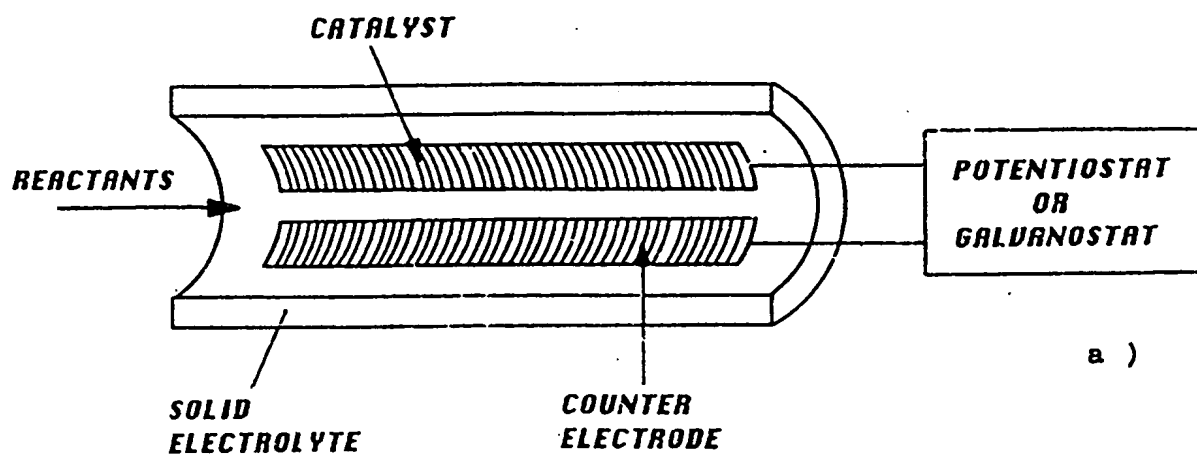
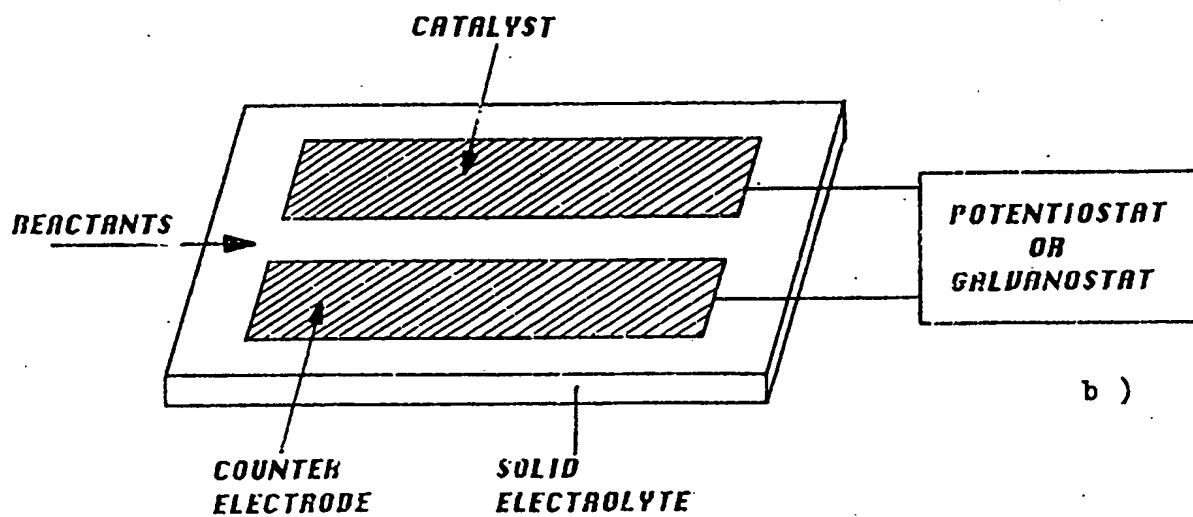


FIGURE 1



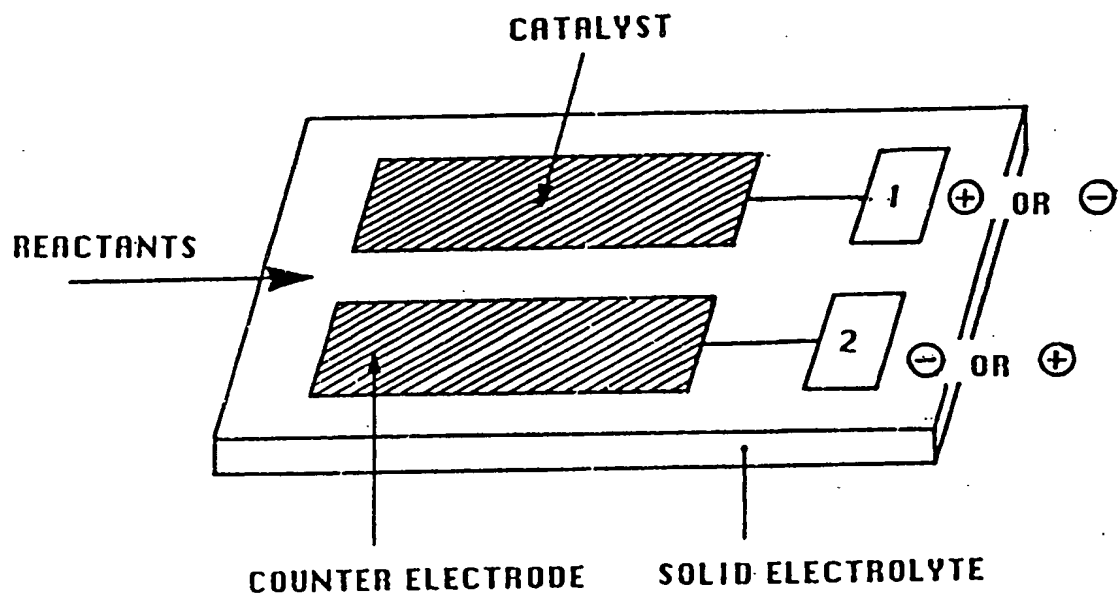
a )



b )

FIGURE 2





**FIGURE 3**

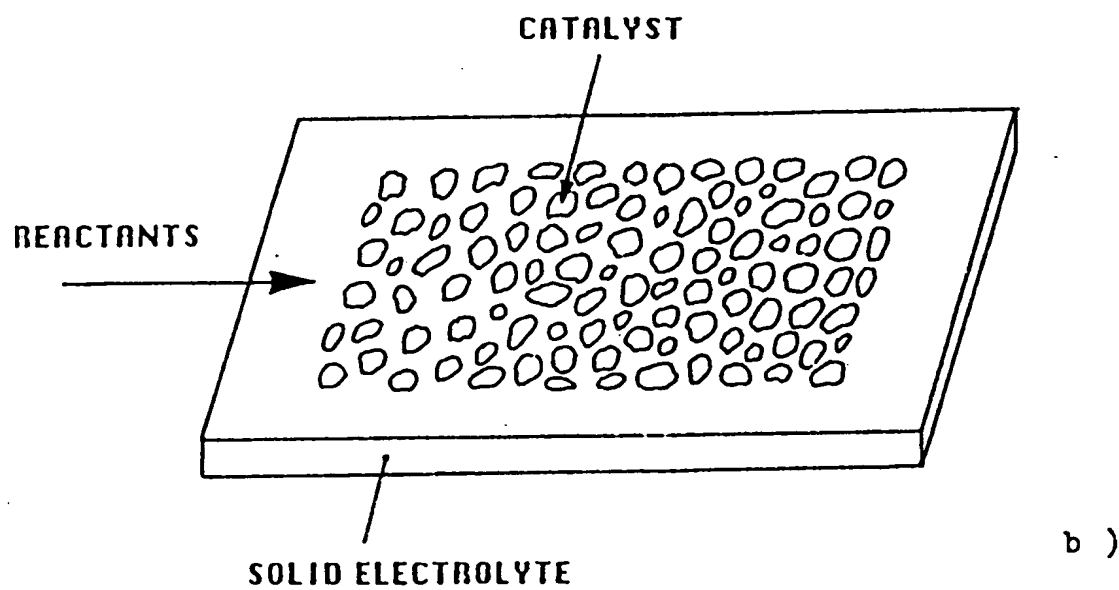
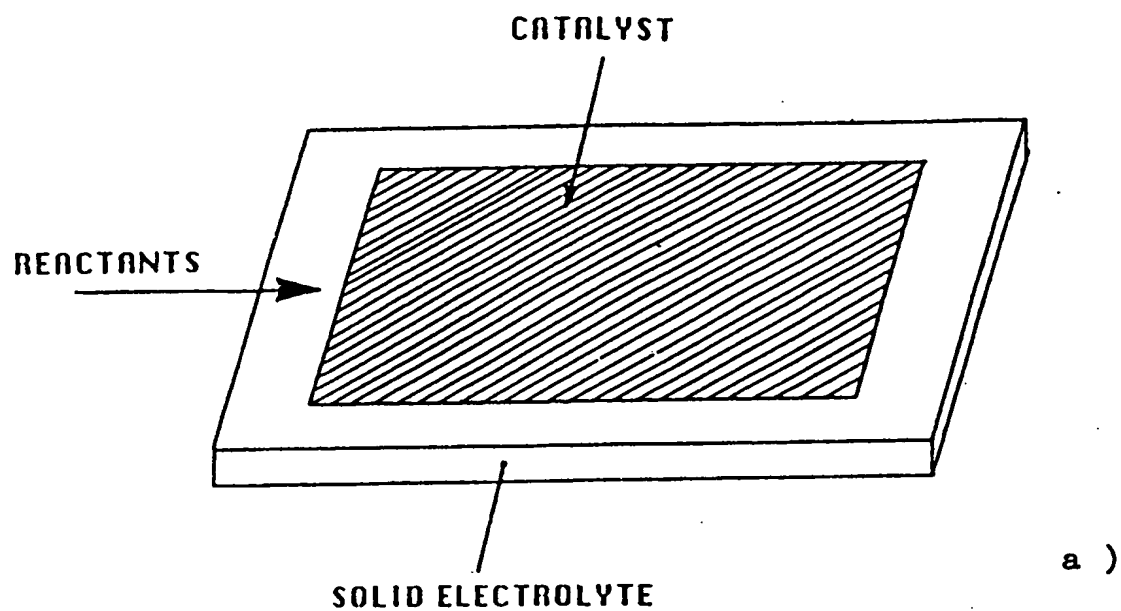


FIGURE 4

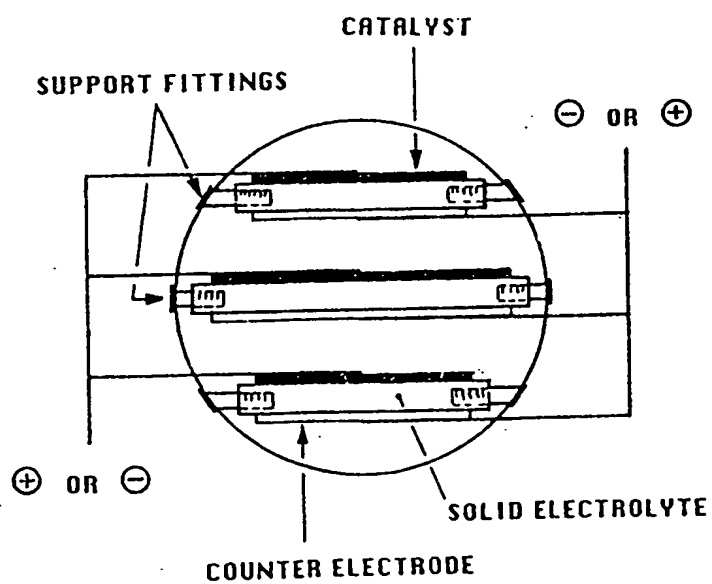
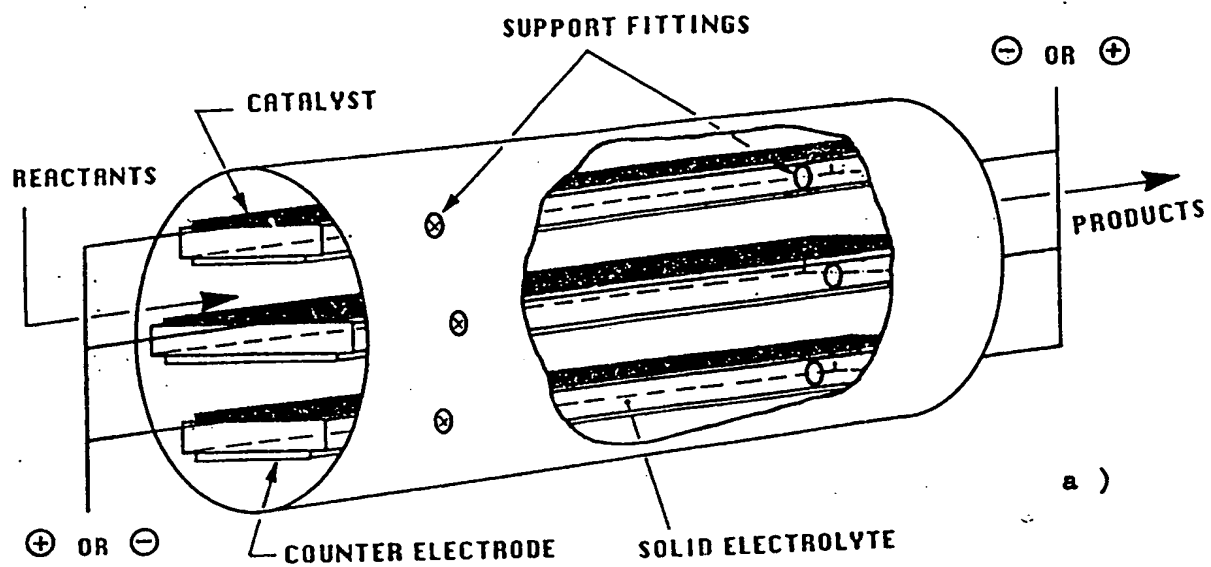


FIGURE 5

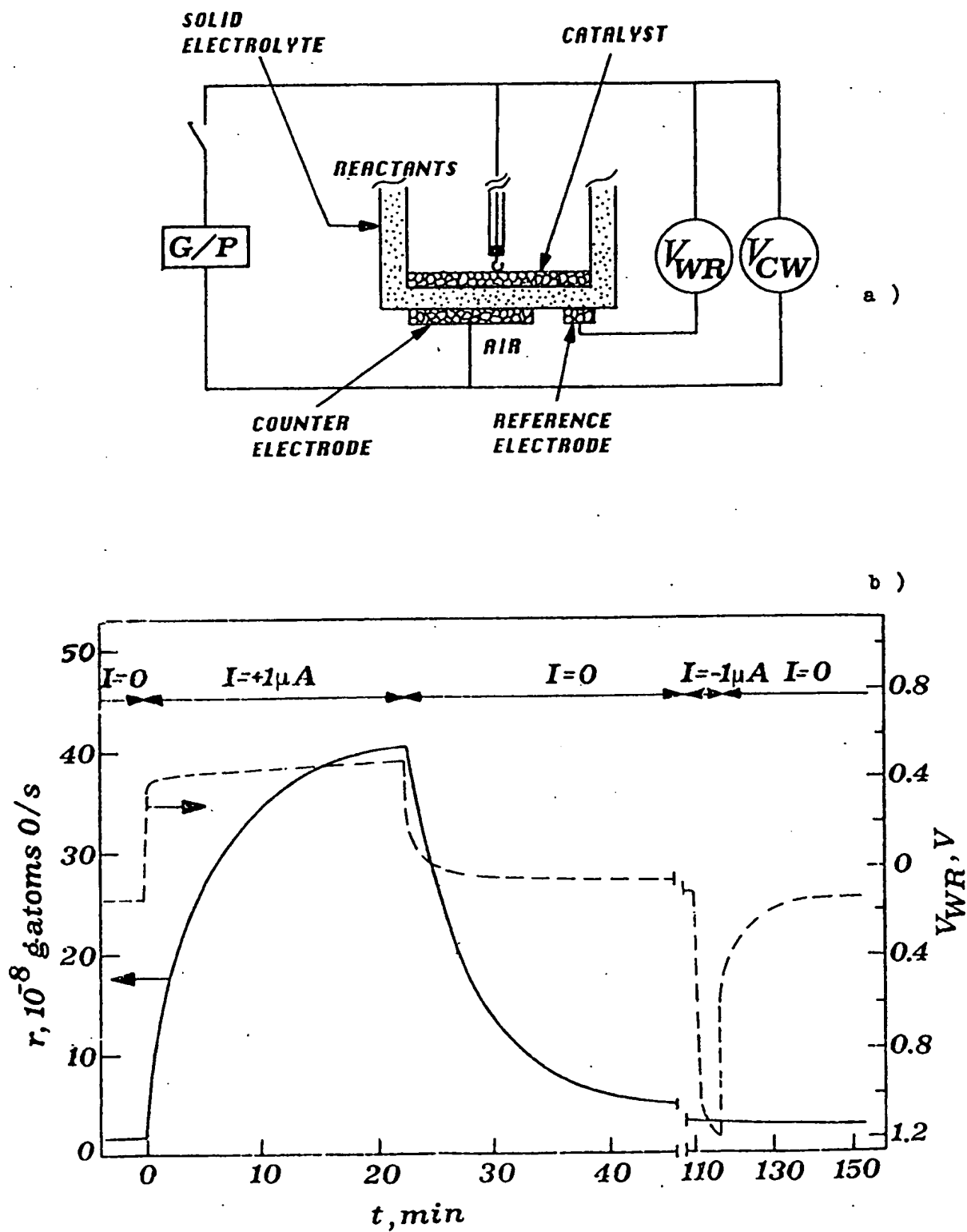


FIGURE 6



European  
Patent Office

## EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

EP 90 60 0021

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D,X	NATURE, vol. 343, 15th February 1990, pages 625-627; C.G. VAYENAS et al.: "Dependence of catalytic rates on catalyst work function" * Abstract; figure 1; table 1 *	1	
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search The Hague		Date of completion of search 14 June 91	Examiner D'HONDT J.W.
<b>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</b> X: particularly relevant if taken alone Y: particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A: technological background O: non-written disclosure P: intermediate document T: theory or principle underlying the invention E: earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D: document cited in the application L: document cited for other reasons &: member of the same patent family, corresponding document			



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## EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

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### DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.5)
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A	WO-A-8 302 605 (W.R. GRACE & CO.) * Claim 1; page 5, lines 9-15 *	1	
A	US-A-4 329 208 (C.G. VAYENAS et al.)		
A	US-A-4 092 227 (W. HAIDINGER) * Claims 1,4,6,7,8; column 7, lines 22-30; column 3, lines 13-18 *	1	
A	US-A-4 863 813 (C.K. DYER)		
A	US-A-4 248 941 (G.A. LOUIS et al.)		
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.5)
Place of search		Date of completion of search	Examiner
The Hague		14 June 91	D'HONDT J.W.
<p><b>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</b></p> <p>X: particularly relevant if taken alone Y: particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A: technological background O: non-written disclosure P: intermediate document T: theory or principle underlying the invention</p> <p>E: earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D: document cited in the application L: document cited for other reasons</p> <p>&amp;: member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p>			